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ABSTRACT

Lehigh County Community College has made inroads in providing education to meet the needs of the elderly in four areas: (1) development of campus policy regarding the elderly; (2) establishment of community-based courses and activities for the elderly; (3) establishment of training programs for personnel in agencies that work with the elderly, and for private business owners who employ the elderly; (4) identification of the campus as a center for advocacy for the elderly. Specific achievements in each of these four areas are delineated in this document. For example, Lehigh has established a no-tuition policy for senior citizens; has introduced a Social Gerontology course into the curriculum; has employed senior citizens on campus; has established a community-based film series, a "Nutrition Bingo Program," and courses in such subjects as decoupage, ceramics, and creative home decorations; has offered conferences entitled "Changing Perceptives of Mental Health and the Elderly," "Modified Therapeutic Communities Conference," "Lutheran Chaplaincy Training Conference," and "Preretirement Planning"; subscribes to and supports groups such as the Gray Panthers and the Pennsylvania Association for Older Persons; and has created a Speaker's Bureau for the Elderly. (NHM)

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THE ROLE OF THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE AND THE AGING

In a suicide note dated July 16, 1962, an elderly woman who had swallowed some pills in the ladies' lounge of a downtown California bus station and sat quietly until she died unnoticed by the people around her, wrote the following:

> "I am sorry I had to do this, but I have not a cent to eat on, no place to live. I thought maybe I could get some work, but it seems like I could not. I have not one relative left ... No money to bury me, so please just bury me as cheap as you can or cremate and put in Ocean."

Almost sixteen years later, Harry Asirmow, a ninety-five old pioneer of the senior citizens movement, celebrated his birthday with 200 well-wishers at his side. Too weak to stand, he sat in his chair and uttered these words:

> "If my life has had meaning, it must be because I wanted your lives to be purposeful and productive ... Our concern is not only for each other but for humanity. If I am not destined to be with you, I want to be remembered on this date for the next five years, when I reach my 100th birthday, for the reasons I have already described. God bless you all."

After saying this, he slumped forward in the chair and died.

My purpose in relating these two stories is not to establish an atmosphere of melodrama in discussing education for the elderly. Rather, what I hope to suggest is that progress is being made in the ever increasing need to improve the quality of life for the elderly. The Federal government, through the Administration on Aging, has made great strides toward providing money, food, and shelter for older Americans, which is not to say that much more need not be done. However, because of the dramatic needs for direct service, the notion of improving 'the quality of life' through education is a relatively new dimension to meeting the needs of older people.

As with any new field of endeavor, the potential is limitless until tested against the reality of the situation. Working from this point of view, I would like to caution any institution which is developing a program for the elderly to heed the advice given by Lieutenant Governor Kline at the Human Services Conference here at Hershey some weeks ago. He was addressing himself to the advances made in the field of corrections when he quoted the following statement from James Q. Wilson's book, Thinking About Crime.

> " I argue for a sober view of man and his institutions that would permit reasonable things to be accomplished, foolish things to be abandoned, and utopian things forgotten. A sober view of man requires a modest definition of progress."

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And, although he was not talking about education for the elderly, I sincerely believe that a 'modest definition of progress' is all that we can hope for at the present.

I do not intend by this to argue that progress can not and has not been made. Instead, I would like to suggest that it is difficult to define what progress is being made because there is not preconceived or established measurements against which to delineate success or failure. What I intend to do is to share with you this morning what we at Lehigh County Community College are doing to provide education to meet the needs of the elderly in the two-county area which we serve. If what I say seems disjointed or rambling, it is only because I am trying to reflect the diversity of activities involved in developing such a program.

I assumed the position of Coordinator of Services for the Aging at the end of last October. My position was funded through a grant from Title IV-A of the Older Americans Act as amended in 1972 and jointly sponsored by Lehigh County Community College and the Area Agencies on Aging of both Carbon and Lehigh Counties. The grant allowed for my salary, secretarial support, in-house services, and transportation. What it did not contain, however, was a formula for success.

After doing some preliminary research in the rapidly proliferating literature on education and the elderly and talking to many agencies providing service for the elderly, I felt a little like Don Quixote setting out as knight errant to save anyone over age sixty. Armed with this vision, I managed to get invited to approximately twenty-five senior citizen clubs, one AARP chapter, and one MORA club. There are many more groups, but they preferred travelogues and bingo to my wisdom. I can say with unqualified candor that I was received with politeness, but I became painfully aware that my pleas for what education could do were met with spontaneous and unanimous indifference.

My ego was dented but undaunted as I went to a training symposium sponsored by Federal City College in Washington for training of faculty. It was then that I discovered my situation was not unique, and I was encouraged by Mr. Sean Sweeney, the director of training in Harrisburg, to visit Doreen Heller at Allegheny Community College. What I got from Doreen, apart from inspiration because of her enthusiasm and energy, was quite simple: Find out what can be done, not simply what needs to be done, and do it! From that point on, the job became, if not easy, at least manageable.

I defined, therefore, four major areas in which I thought the College could make a contribution and I started to make progress. The four areas can best be defined in terms of the following objectives:

1. To establish policy on campus regarding the elderly;

2. To begin courses and activities in the community for the elderly;

3. To design programs for agency people in the community who work with the elderly and for private business and industry who employ the elderly;

4. To have the campus identified as a center for advocacy for the elderly.

Before discussing these four specific areas, however, I think it might be worthwhile to mention two things we did early in the program. First, in an attempt to create an identity for the program and its ongoing character, we called it "The Continuing Adventure Program." Subsequent activities and programs could then be publicized under this name and the program achieved distinction in its own right. The second and certainly just as important thing is the creation of an advisory committee. The advisory committee is composed of the executive directors of both Area Agencies on the Aging, a member of the Board of Trustees, who acts as a valuable liaison for us, the Vice-President of Academic Affairs, a member of the faculty, two representatives at large from each county as well as members of the Community Services staff. This committee has been invaluable in providing insight into funding sources in the community and in realistically assessing the progress of the program

I would like to turn my attention now to the four areas mentioned before:

Development of Campus Policy:

1. Working through the Community-Sponsor Relations Committee, one member of which is on the advisory committee, we were able to propose a no-tuition policy for senior citizens. The Board passed the proposal at its January 2, 1975 meeting and we could accept registration for the Spring semester. The policy reads as follows:

   a. A student must exhibit proof of age by using their Medicare Card, Birth Certificate, or other official document.

   b. The requested course must have sufficient enrollment of regular students to justify offering it exclusive of senior citizens.

   c. The enrollment of senior citizens must not cause the class size to exceed the college enrollment limitations.

   To date, we have had nine people take advantage of this program, registering for courses ranging from accounting to golf and volleyball. Because our Director of Community Services holds a joint position with the Lehigh County Vo-Tech, he was able to introduce a similar proposal there, and as of July 1975, the Vo-Tech will allow senior citizens to take tuition-free courses

2. Another development on campus has been the introduction of a Social Gerontology course into the curriculum. Once again, this had to be effected with great haste in order to offer it for the Spring term. We were extremely fortunate to have a faculty member who had training in gerontology and influence enough on the faculty to make this possible. Despite the reservations on some parts about the enrollment possibilities, there are thirty-two people taking the course, most of whom are agency people.

3. The most recent program development on campus has been the introduction of senior citizens as employees on campus. There are actually two different programs represented. One man comes to us from "Mainstream" which is sponsored by Manpower. The other two people are

enrollees in the Senior Community Service Employment Program, an organization sponsored by NRTA and AARP for the purpose of providing on-the-job training for people 55 years of age and older in an attempt to place them in private industry. Although there are only three people in these programs to date, the experience has been rewarding and gratifying for all concerned.

Community Based Programs - "Satellite Programs":

1. The "Continuing Adventure Film Series," financed by the joint Area Agencies on Aging, was shown to 1,380 senior citizens at nutrition sites, county homes, and high-rise housing developments for the aging. The films represented classic comedy, historical, adventure, and musical films. It served as an excellent way of introducing the College's program to the people.

2. The "Nutrition Intern Program," though modest in conception, enabled students from our Practical Nutrition course to observe and participate in the nutrition sites for a week. As a follow-up, the nutrition managers from the county area agencies on aging came to class to answer questions and provide additional information. As a result of this experience, the students were exposed to a new vocational opportunity which many of them had not entertained before.

3. The "Nutrition Bingo Program" was developed by Miss Linda Anthony of the Community Services staff and is designed to improve the awareness of nutrition site participants with daily food requirements. Because of its entertainment value, people are far more receptive to it than if the content were presented in lecture form.

4. There are three ten-week courses which have recently been started.

   a. Decoupage - This is taught at the senior citizen drop-in center at the Salvation Army.

   b. Ceramics - This likewise is being given at the Salvation Army in an attempt to up-grade the present program.

   c. Creative Home Decorations - This course is taught at the Lehighton Nutrition site by a senior citizen who specializes in how to be creative with household items that would otherwise be discarded.

5. A "Late Start Program" will be started in September as a contracted course for the Area Agency on Aging. This program is designed to reach low-income, isolated elderly in attempting to involve them in social and volunteer activities. This is a fertile area for two-year colleges to start serving the elderly because the State had mandated that every multi-service or neighborhood center sponsor Late Start Programs.

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Training for Agency and Private Business Personnel:

1. "Changing Perceptives of Mental Health and the Elderly"
   This conference was co-sponsored by the College and the Allentown State Hospital. It was attended by 150 people from social agencies, the college LPN students, and the hospital staff.

2. "Modified Therapeutic Communities Conference"
   This program grew out of the Area Agency on Aging need to find alternatives to institutionalizing the elderly. The program was jointly sponsored by the College and the Mental Health - Mental Retardation of Lehigh County.

3. "Lutheran Chaplaincy Training Conference"
   This is a recently formed church volunteer program to serve the elderly through a lay ministry. We developed a one-day workshop to acquaint the volunteers with the community's social and governmental agencies that they might use as information and referral sources in their work.

4. "Pre-retirement Planning" can be a vital way of helping individuals and local business and industry perform a valuable service in view of the decreasing retirement ages. Although we have not offered a course to date, we are in the process of researching and developing one. A particularly fruitful way of approaching this is to work with the local unions who are expressing increased interest in providing benefits for workers

Advocacy for the Elderly:

1. The College can subscribe to and support already established advocacy groups such as the Gray Panthers, and the Pennsylvania Association of Older Persons.

2. We have created a Speaker's Bureau for the Elderly and have used my office as a clearinghouse for requests. The mailing list of the College was extremely useful in disseminating information, and agencies throughout both counties have provided speakers and topics.

3. Needless to say, I have become involved in community groups such as the local television community service advisory committee and have served on planning committees for local four-year colleges when they sponsor events involving the elderly.

This, then, is what has happened at Lehigh County Community College in the past six months. None of this, however, could have been done by one man appointed to the position of Coordinator of Services for the Aging. It is, instead, a total college commitment.

I feel extremely fortunate in having Jim Kistler as Director of Community Services. His insight into, encouragement of, and enthusiasm for this program have done much to insure its success. Likewise, the administration, the Board of Trustees, the faculty, and my colleagues in Community Services have been receptive and supportive of what has been done. What all of this means is that success, if we can call it that, comes through an overall awareness of the need to serve a very important and too long neglected part of the community.